

News Release

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Final Recovery Plan Issued for the Rarest Trout in America

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released the final revised recovery plan for Paiute cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki seleniris*), the rarest trout in America. Paiute cutthroat trout are only native to an 11-mile stretch of Silver King Creek, a major tributary to the East Fork of the Carson River located in Alpine County, California in the eastern Sierra mountain range.

"This fish is a fascinating example of adaptation and evolution," says Bob Williams, Supervisor for the Nevada Fish & Wildlife Office. "This species was cut off from its family over 5,000 years ago, and it evolved into a distinct trout species by adapting to this remote 11-mile stretch of a creek."

The Paiute cutthroat trout was listed as *endangered* in 1967 under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966 and subsequently reclassified to *threatened* in 1975 under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, facilitating management of the species and to allow regulated angling. This revised plan is an update of a recovery plan that the Service first prepared in 1985. The revised plan incorporates recent research data and addresses the species' current status, threats, distribution, and recovery needs.

The goal of the ESA is to recover listed species to the point where they are secure, self-sustaining members of their ecosystems and no longer need federal protection. A recovery plan is a blueprint providing guidance for actions by federal, state and other public agencies and private interests that will lead to the recovery and delisting of a species. Recovery plans are advisory only. They do not obligate the expenditure of funds or require that the recommended actions be implemented.

The Service worked with biologists from California Department of Fish & Game and the U.S. Forest Service to develop the revised plan. Key objectives include improving populations of Paiute cutthroat trout in its native habitat, improving the quality of habitat, and eliminating competition from nonnative trout.

Recovery Plan for Rare Trout

One of the challenges in updating the recovery plan was to take into account the impact that recovery actions would have on two rare amphibians that live in the same drainage. The Sierra Nevada population of the mountain yellow-legged frog (*Rana muscosa*) and the Yosemite toad (*Bufo canorus*) are both candidates for federal protection.

“This recovery effort will focus on improving the ecosystem,” says Williams. “A healthy stream and riparian corridor will benefit all the species that live there.”

For example, removing self-sustaining nonnative trout is a main objective of the plan that will benefit many native species. Nonnative trout pose a threat to mountain yellow-legged frogs. Scientists have found that the frog occurs in areas inhabited by Paiute cutthroat trout, but not in areas inhabited by nonnative Rainbow trout.

While the Paiute cutthroat trout originate from Silver King Creek, they were transplanted to areas outside of their native habitat in the 1940's. There currently are four self-sustaining out-of-basin, genetically pure populations of Paiute cutthroat trout. They are found in the North Fork of Cottonwood Creek and Cabin Creek in the Inyo National Forest, and Stairway Creek and Sharktooth Creek in the Sierra National Forest.

Fishing is currently allowed in Cabin, Stairway, and Sharktooth creeks, however, access is not easy due to their remoteness. By returning Paiute cutthroat to their native range and delisting them from the endangered species list, the public may be able to enjoy catching the rarest trout in America. “We have an opportunity to restore a rare species and create a very unique trout fishery,” says Williams.

The total estimated cost of recovering Paiute cutthroat trout is \$558,000, but actions are advisory only and there is no requirement for the expenditure of funds. The Service expects to initiate delisting of the Paiute cutthroat trout in 2013, if tasks are implemented as recommended and recovery criteria are met.

A draft recovery plan was published in the Federal Register on January 26, 2004. Public comments have been addressed and changes made where appropriate. The plan is available on line at <http://nevada.fws.gov>, or by calling the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Nevada Fish & Wildlife Office at 775-861-6300. Copies can also be obtained from the Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office at 1340 Financial Blvd. #234, Reno, NV 89502.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program,

which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.